



LACK OF EVIDENCE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT OBJECTION TO THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL HYPOTHESIS

John Harney

IT IS generally agreed that most UFO reports can be explained if sufficient and accurate information about them is available to investigators. It is said, though, that a small number of reports remain unexplained despite careful investigation, and that it is reasonable to suppose that these are sightings of extraterrestrial spacecraft. This is known as the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH).

The ETH is superficially attractive and apparently rational. Among the great mass of UFO reports are some genuine sightings of ET spacecraft and these are discovered by a process of elimination, rather like separating gold from gravel. Problems arise when a report seems impressive and is touted by believers in the ETH as definitely or probably a genuine sighting of an alien craft. When this happens, any further investigations or critical examination of the evidence and testimony tend to be unwelcome.

In cases where seemingly impressive reports have been subjected to further investigation, though, evidence usually emerges to show that there are mundane explanations available, or that there are serious flaws and inconsistencies in the evidence and testimony.

We are often told that certain cases can not be explained as misperceptions or hoaxes because there were multiple witnesses, so they must be genuine UFOs. In the first issue of this newsletter, I briefly discussed the Trindade Island case of 16 January 1958, in which a UFO was allegedly seen and photographed from the Brazilian navy vessel *Almirante Saldanha*, and noted that there was no agreement as to how many witnesses there were. (1) Anyone who

reads the literature on this case will also note that there are no statements available from these witnesses. It was simply asserted that there had been many witnesses, even though the US Assistant Naval Attaché, when he boarded the ship, could not find anyone who claimed to have seen the UFO.

Since I published this, no one has been able to produce any statements made by these alleged witnesses, only statements by the principal witness, and by one or two people who were not even there at the time, assuring us that many of those on board the *Almirante Saldanha* actually saw the object.

This is the way UFO events tend to be treated when investigators wish to bolster their belief in the ETH. They are inclined to accept any details which point to exotic explanations and do not inquire too closely into the reliability of the evidence and testimony.

Perhaps it would be helpful to those who are puzzled by the rejection of the ETH by many ufologists, if I try to set out the serious objections to it. Some of the objections which are made are false or irrelevant, so I think it is a good idea to try to compile a list of genuine ones. I'll start with a list which includes what seem to me to be a mixture of valid and invalid objections, given by Dr J. Allen Hynek in a lecture in 1983, (2) with my comments added:

1. "Failure of Sophisticated Surveillance Systems to Detect Incoming or Outgoing UFOs."

This seems a fairly sound objection. Spacecraft entering orbit, and space shuttles and

satellites re-entering the atmosphere are routinely detected and tracked, as are many meteors. Yet UFOs are not tracked and spectacularly bright UFOs somehow fail to appear on satellite pictures. It is, of course, claimed by some ETH believers that UFO tracking information is kept secret, but surveillance is carried out by different nations. There are also many amateurs who track satellites and observe satellite re-entries and meteor showers, and would surely notice and make careful records of anything unusual and share them with other enthusiasts.

2. “Gravitational and Atmospheric Considerations.” Extraterrestrials could not function on our planet as the beings in CE3s are said to do. They could not walk about with ease or inhale our air or, even more to the point, levitate.

CE3 sightings rarely have independent witnesses. This is not a problem unless we choose to believe such stories and take them as being real physical events rather than delusions. Before we start to explain or theorise about a UFO event we need to establish the facts of the case. Only if we can satisfy ourselves that the incident really took place as described should we include it in a list of UFO reports requiring explanation, by means of the ETH or otherwise.

We do not know what beings from other planets could or could not do if they landed on Earth, as we have no information about them. Anyway, if any of these CE3 sightings could be authenticated, then we would just have to accept them.

3. “Statistical Considerations”. Distant worlds would not—could not—dispatch as many spacecraft in the numbers UFO reports indicate.

Here we have to assume that a certain proportion of UFO reports are sightings of ET spacecraft. But even if we assume only about one per cent of reports to be genuine, this amounts to a large number (which somehow escape detection by surveillance systems).

This is not a valid objection because it is purely speculative. Assuming that intelligent beings exist elsewhere in the galaxy, we have no knowledge of what they are capable of doing.

For example, it has been suggested that a sufficiently technologically advanced civilisation could produce a self-reproducing universal constructor, known as a von Neumann machine after the man who first showed that such a machine is theoretically possible. Once these machines got going they could produce as many spacecraft as required at no extra cost to their inventors. (3) So, at least in theory, there is no limit to the number of alien spacecraft which could be visiting us, if we are willing to consider the possibility that they might exist

4. “Elusive, Evasive and Absurd Behaviour of UFOs and Their Occupants.” The beings and the craft that bear them do not act as we would were we to travel to a faraway planet.

As with objection 2, we have no good reasons to take such observations too literally, and even if we do it is not reasonable to suppose that ETs would behave as we would expect them to.

5. “Isolation of the UFO Phenomenon in Space and Time: The Cheshire Cat Effect”. UFOs appear and disappear, staying visible for no more than brief periods of time; their being observed at Point A does not mean that they will be seen at Point B even if last spotted heading in that direction.

It is not easy to interpret this. Presumably Hynek was referring to what Jenny Randles has called the Oz Factor where the UFO is seen only by a single witness or a small group of witnesses, and other people in the vicinity at the same time notice nothing unusual. To most rational ufologists such reports suggest a psychological explanation should be sought.

6. “The Space ‘Unworthiness’ of the UFO”. Most UFOs are too small to sustain a crew over the vast distances of the cosmos.

This does not make sense. Obviously, interplanetary or interstellar spacecraft would be too big to land on or to enter the atmospheres of planets but would go into orbit and launch smaller craft for this purpose. This is familiar from accounts of manned and unmanned space missions, as well as science fiction stories.

7. "The Problem of Astronomical Distances". Extraterrestrials could not get here in any reasonable time. (Hynek considered this to be a fatal objection.)

A number of answers to this objection have been suggested by scientists and science fiction writers, including suspended animation and generation starships, where those who arrive at the intended destination are descendants of those who originally set out on the voyage. It can be argued that the vast distances involved make interstellar travel unlikely, but they certainly do not make it impossible.

Most of the objections to the ETH raised by other scientists also have no validity. For example, Carl Sagan argued that even if only a very small fraction of UFO reports were genuine, then there would have to be an unfeasibly large number of interstellar spacecraft. (4) All of Sagan's objections are purely speculative, and he dismisses UFO reports simply because he was able to explain a few which he investigated.

So far we have only one valid objection to the ETH which is that UFOs are not detected entering or leaving the Earth's atmosphere. If such observations were obtained and authenticated it would surely go a long way towards convincing many sceptics that we are indeed being visited by ETs. The other objections are incapable of being verified or are simply wrong, or purely speculative.

The main practical objection, which we have not yet dealt with, is that after 55 years of UFO investigations we not only have no verified observations of UFOs entering and leaving the Earth's atmosphere, but we also have no other clear, accurate and undisputed observations which strongly suggest ET visitations, and no undisputed physical evidence to be linked with the alleged activities of ETs and their spacecraft. We should also take into account the fact that all those who have claimed contact with ETs—whether they are called contactees or abductees—have failed to provide any new and important facts about other planets, etc. which were not already known and which could eventually be verified. For example, if the contactees of the 1950s had published precise, detailed descriptions of other planets, and if

these descriptions had been found many years later to have been true and accurate, then they would have to be taken very seriously. But, as we all know, the vital information which will confirm the truth of the ETH always slips from our grasp, usually just when it seems it is about to be revealed to the world.

Many ETH believers insist that the evidence is kept secret by US government agencies. They never explain how these US agencies manage to persuade every other government in the world to keep the saucers secret also. They never explain how any government agency can keep secret something which it does not control. Of course there is some government secrecy about UFO reports, but this concerns UFO investigation projects, not the UFOs themselves. Any individual or organisation, official or amateur, can conduct secret UFO investigations. Many of them do this so that they can work undisturbed by news media, cranks and the idly curious. They also do it because they wish to respect the rights of witnesses to privacy.

If there are genuine, ET, UFOs they can appear anywhere at any time and be seen by anyone. If there is physical evidence to be had it can fall into the hands of any individual or organisation. To maintain total secrecy about vital UFO evidence is simply impossible.

Thus, while many objections to the ETH have been put forward, it is at least logically possible. The only valid and important objection to it is simply lack of evidence.

Notes

1. 'The ETH and its proponents', *Magonia ETH Bulletin*, No. 1, March 1998
2. Hynek, J. Allen, 'The case against ET', in Walter H. Andrus, Jr., and Dennis W. Stacy (eds), *MUFON 1983 UFO Symposium Proceedings*, 118-26, Mutual UFO Network, 1983 (quoted in Clark, Jerome, *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial*, Visible Ink, Detroit, 1998, 212)
3. Tipler, Frank J., 'Extraterrestrial intelligent beings do not exist', in Regis, Edward, Jr., *Extraterrestrials: Science and Alien Intelligence*, Cambridge University Press, 1985. Tipler's argument is that as ET spaceships are apparently not present in our solar system even though there has been plenty of time for ETs to evolve and develop von Neumann machines, then they don't exist. However, he admits: "But the evidence is not utterly conclusive; beings with extremely advanced technology could be present in our solar system and make their presence undetectable should they wish to do. The point is that a belief in the existence of extraterrestrial intelligent beings anywhere in the galaxy is not significantly different from the widespread belief that UFOs are extraterrestrial spaceships. In fact, I strongly suspect the psychological motivation of both beliefs to be the same, namely 'The expectation that we are going to be saved from ourselves by

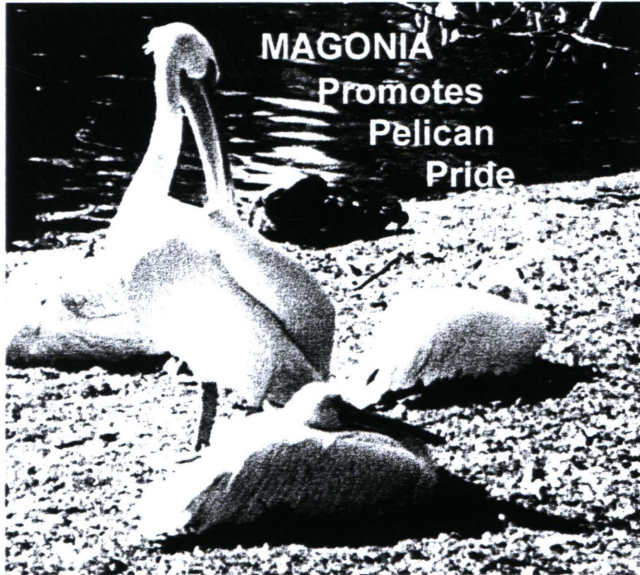
some miraculous interstellar intervention . . . "

4. Sagan, Carl, 'The extraterrestrial and other hypotheses', in Sagan, Carl and Thornton Page (eds), *UFOs-A Scientific Debate*, Cornell University Press, 1973

Correction

In the previous issue (No. 40) the last sentence of the Editorial should be:

If enough suitable material is forthcoming we can return to publishing monthly or even more often.



St James's Park, London, 24 September 2002

EDITORIAL

In this issue we return to the theme of the ETH, which this newsletter was originally started to discuss, with the aim of getting believers in the ETH to present the best evidence for it in a clear and rational manner and to list those UFO incidents which they thought should be presented as the most promising indications that the ETH might be true, and might eventually be shown to be true. It was all in vain, as most ETH enthusiasts greatly resent having their favourite UFO reports subjected to critical examination and seeing all the flaws and inconsistencies in the stories laid bare. However, we intend to persist in exposing the weaknesses of the case for ET spaceships and their occupants, in the hope that some ufologists will eventually see sense.



Left to right: Mark McCann, Gareth Medway, Dr David Clarke, Andy Roberts, Mark Pilkington, John Rimmer

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